

Howland Wood - Curatorial

Britton, Roswell Sessoms, Prof.

1933-1937

[Dept. of Chinese Studies

Columbia University]

ROSWELL S. BRITTON
430 WEST 118TH STREET
NEW YORK CITY

29 September 1933

The Curator
The American Numismatic Society
New York

Dear Mr. Wood

In regard to the large early Chinese silver bars
which you kindly showed me a few days ago:

1. The bar inscribed Tso Shang Fang Tsao 左尚方造
or in modern characters 左尚方造. This inscription quite
definitely dates in the last years of the Han Dynasty, ending A.D. 220.
The Shang Fang was an office or department established by the Han for
making objects used in the palace. At the end of the dynasty, that is,
in its last years, this office was divided into three sections, the
^{1.}Middle, ^{3.}Right and ^{2.}Left. In subsequent dynasties the name of the office
was altered by dropping the character Fang. The inscription therefore
belongs to the latest Han years, and means: "Made at the Left Shang-Fang".
The seal character, or more likely two characters, at the bottom of
the piece, I have not been able to make out.

2. The companion bar to the foregoing, inscribed Blank Ho Erh Nien
[?] 和二年. I believe this refers to the reign Chang Ho 章和
A.D. 87-88, of the Later Han Dynasty. The date, second year, would
then be A.D. 88. This is little better than conjecture.

Regarding the pair of small silver bars, I have verified the
inscription Chung Yuan Erh Nien 中元二年 as B.C. 148, as you
have it; but I am not yet able to make out anything of the other.

I am still working on the figure on the gold nugget.

I wonder if you would like for me to bring up Mr. C. C. Wang, my
Chinese friend who has had considerable experience in reading inscriptions
on Chinese paintings, sculptures, &c. ?

Yours very truly

Roswell S. Britton

September 30, 1933.

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 West 118th Street
New York City.

Dear Mr. Britton:

Many thanks for the trouble you have gone to in working out the characters on those bars. This will be a great help to me. I would be very glad to have you bring up Mr. Wang any time at your convenience. It would however be well to telephone first as I am away one day a week but never can tell which day.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

左 Tso
 小 Shang
 同 Fang
 方 Tsoo
 造

made at the left Shang Fang
 the Shang Fang was an
 office created by the Eastern
 Han Dyn. in the later part
 of their rule about 2nd cent
 A.D. for making objects
 used in the Palace.

The office was divided later into
 middle left & right. carried on
 by other dynasties without the character
 Fang.

bottom character have not read

建 Chien gen
 和 He her
 二 Erh
 年 nien

14/8 AD the first
 nien ho of the
 Emperor Huan Ti

棟 118

第 177

建

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Name.....

Address.....

October 4, 1933.

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 West 118th St.
New York City.

Dear Mr. Britton:

I have just had a chance to study your findings on those Han bars. Locating the probable date of the one inscribed Tso Hang Fang Tsao I have been able to place the other one. The two are so nearly identical in shape, size, looks etc. that they could not be very far apart in age. I therefore read the piece Chien Ho Ehr Nien, the second year of the Emperor Huan Ti or the year 148 A. D. This first character Chien absolutely fits the vague first character on the bar. The little bar with Chung Wuan Ehr Nien I think is not properly assignable to 57 A. D. This Nien Ho is found for the year 147 B. C. and 56 A. D. There is a written record somewhere that silver bars were made in the latter period. I saw Carrington Goodrich last night at the Oriental Club and he mentioned that he had seen you recently and that you had been up here. Trusting to see you soon, I remain

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

November 1, 1933.

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 West 118th St.
New York City.

Dear Mr. Britton:

As you asked me last night,
I am herewith sending a photograph of that
little gold ingot. Unfortunately it is not
as good as it might be but nevertheless it
gives a true aspect of the characters. I
appreciate the time you have taken over this
and trust I am not causing you too much trouble.
I hope to see you next Tuesday at the Oriental
Club.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

ROSWELL S. BRITTON
430 WEST 118TH STREET
NEW YORK CITY

7 March 1934

Dear Mr. Wood

This from Williams's Dictionary:

厘 厘 兀 from 里 li, village, and 厂 li
or 厂 han, cliff, as contraction. The second form
is now mostly used for the decimal. The third form is a
common contraction. Definition: in arithmetic, the
third term in fractions; a hundredth; the thousandth part
of a tael, nominally equal to the copper mill, or native
coin called a cash by foreigners, from caixa, the Moorish
name for the tin coin found at Malacca in early days.

Yours

Roswell S. Britton

Mr. Howland Wood
American Numismatic Society
New York

March 9, 1934.

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 West 118th Street
New York City.

Dear Mr. Britton:

Having the phonetic to go
by I found the character li. Many thanks
for the trouble you took about this.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

Mr. Wood
You will be interested to
read this. — Please return it
to me at your convenience.

R. S. Miller

March 14, 1934.

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 West 118th Street
New York City.

Dear Mr. Britton:

I am herewith returning your letter from Bishop. I was much interested in reading it. As the small gold coin has waited a great many hundreds of years to be attributed I guess it can wait a few more months. We will evidently have to put Bishop right that the piece here is the one found on the site.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

ROSWELL S. BRITTON
430 WEST 118TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y.

9 April 1935

Dear Mr Wood

After diddling with some 19 hypotheses I have come to a tentative conclusion concerning the little gold ingot. Before writing it out, I would like to check the weight of the ingot against its volume. I wonder if you have a graduated glass, or other device, by which you could ascertain its volume? The weight is 3.77 grams. With the cubic contents, we could check on the quality of the gold, and also speculate on the unit of value involved.

I would be grateful also for another one of the pictures of the ingot. Mr Bishop mistook the other picture you gave me for a gift to him.

My tentative conclusion is that it is a Shang piece, that the inscription reads " 75 ", and that it is of the character of money. Perhaps this is a result of subjective reasoning. But, as the Chinese say of the amulet coins, if this is not money, then what is it?

Yours truly

Roswell S. Britton

April 10, 1935.

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 West 114th Street
New York City.

Dear Mr. Britton:

We have no device for getting the specific gravity of things but at the first opportunity I will take it out and get this done. The weight of the piece is 3.79 grams. I am herewith enclosing another photograph of the piece. I am glad to think that you have put it back into the Shang period. By that do you mean before 1400 B. C. Will let you know in a few days its density.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

ROSWELL S. BRITTON

430 WEST 118TH STREET

NEW YORK, N. Y.

13 April 1935

Dear Mr. Wood

No, I did not mean to refer the gold ingot to a period prior to 1400 B.C., when I said I had concluded that it belonged to Shang. I am following the practice of several scholars in dropping the use of the character Yin in reference to ~~the~~ the period preceding Chou. The Yin character has not been identified on any of the divination shells/bones. The inference is that the Yin designation was used by the Chou people in reference to the preceding kingdom, and not by the Shang people themselves. Yin was probably a place name, applying to the location of a later capital of the Shang Kingdom; whence the Chou use of the term. The paleograph for the character Shang occurs frequently on the shells/bones, as the name of the chief city and hence also of the kingdom. This tends against the conventional explanation that there was a change of dynastic designation, from Shang to Yin, during the Shang period. The capital was moved, frequently, and it would be natural for the Chou people to refer to the Shang people by a place or regional name associated with their later location.

Yours truly

Roswell S. Britton

May 15, 1933.

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 W. 118th St.
New York City.

Dear Mr. Britton:

I have just had the specific gravity of the gold piece determined which is 9.60. This was a great surprise to all of us as gold is about 19. and silver around 10. A second test was made which brought it again 9.60. Prof. Campbell of the School of Mines of Columbia University examined the piece very thoroughly under a glass and he does not think it is old. He was judging by certain bits of crystallization that to him look new. As for myself, I really do not know what to say.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

Wt. of coin 3.7108 gms.

Sp. gr. of coin 9.60

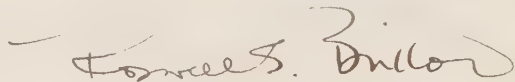
ROSWELL S. BRITTON
430 WEST 118TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y.

30 May 1935

Dear Mr. Wood

Thanks for your letter about the specific gravity of the little ingot. No wonder it was difficult to match the style of the inscription. Please do not regret the time I spent on it. It was good practice for me. Do you suppose Mieller himself made the ingot ?

Very truly yours

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Roswell S. Britton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the left.

ROSWELL S. BRITTON
430 WEST 118TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y.

1 August 1935

Dear Mr. Wood

Do you have the Blätter für Münzfreunde,
1923, No. 10-11 ? If so, I wish to come up to
consult it.

Enclosed clipping may interest you. Shall we
say that the bandits have performed a public service ?

Yours truly

Roswell S. Britton

Mr. Howland Wood
American Numismatic Society
New York City

and enclosed for Mr. Wood
to Mr. Wood
to Mr. Wood
to Mr. Wood

Bandits in Mongolia

Seize U. S. Journalist

John Goette Reported Held With German for Ransom

TOKIO, July 30 (Tuesday) (AP).—The vernacular press reported today the kidnaping of John Goette, thirty-nine-year-old American newspaper man, and Dr. Herbert Mueller, German correspondent of the Deutsches Nachrichten Buero, official German news agency, by bandits in Inner Mongolia three weeks ago.

The men were touring in an automobile, and, according to unconfirmed reports, the chauffeur was released and ordered to carry back a demand for a ransom of 100,000 yuan (about \$39,000). American and German diplomats at Peiping are negotiating with authorities in an effort to obtain their release, it was understood here.

It was reported from Kalgan, Inner Mongolia, yesterday, that Gareth Jones, of "The Manchester Guardian," former secretary to David Lloyd George, had been kidnaped with the German journalist, but reports today did not mention him.

Goette, who was born in Philadelphia, is an employee of the International News Service. He is a veteran war correspondent and has had much experience in news reporting in the Orient.

August 2, 1935.

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 W. 118th Street
New York City.

Dear Mr. Britton:

In Mr. Wood's absence I am answering your letter of August 1st. We have a complete file of the Blatter fur Munzfrunde which we should be glad to have you consult any week day from nine until five o'clock.

Your letter and the clipping regarding Dr. Herbert Mueller will be referred to Mr. Wood upon his return.

Very truly yours,

RR:JG

Assistant Curator

ROSWELL S. BRITTON
430 WEST 118TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y.

24 August 1935

Dear Mr. Wood or Mr. Robertson

I would like to accept Dr. Newell's invitation, and use your binocular microscope and metric calipers on these bone inscriptions, on Wednesday next, August 28. If convenient to you, I would like to come early, shortly after 9 a.m.

If you are still agreeable to taking a couple of photos of these bones for me, we could also do that.

With thanks,

Yours truly

Roswell S. Britton

ROSWELL S. BRITTON
430 WEST 118TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y.

31 August 1935

Dear Mr. Wood

I am sorry we have missed connection so regularly. Will you let me know what day if any you will be at the Museum Sept. 9-12 ? Or if you are going to be there on Wednesday Sept. 4 or Friday Sept. 6, I might get up then. My object is to show the bones to you, and to take advantage of your kind offer to make a couple of plates of them. I shall not take more than two plates at this time.

Yours truly

S. Britton

September 4, 1935.

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 W. 118th St.
New York City.

Dear Mr. Britton:

I did not receive your letter until my return to the office today. I however will be in Friday, September 6, and will be glad to see you then. I am sorry that we have been sort of dodging one and other but was waiting for a telephone call from you about two weeks ago.

Very truly yours,

HW:JG

Curator

Rome S. Britton

466 rue Lafayette
Shanghai, China

19 October 1935

Mr. Howland Wood
American Numismatic Society
Broadway at 156th street
New York City

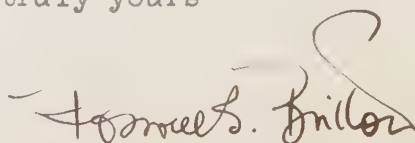
Dear Mr. Wood

Thanks for the prints of the photos
which you and Mr. Robertson so kindly made for me.
They arrived here in due course, and are excellent.

Things look quiet on the numismatic front here.
H. C. Gibson has made a rather neat display in the
cases, of the small collection of the museum of the
N.C.B. R.A.S. I have not yet got in touch with
the instigators of that Shanghai numismatic society.

Professor Gerould, at Princeton, writes me that he
is going to avail himself of your kind offer to
harbor the bones until my return in January. Perhaps
he wrote you also.

Very truly yours

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Roswell S. Britton'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping 'S' at the end.

March 25, 1936

Mr. Roswell S. Britton
430 West 118th Street
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Britton:

I have just come across the letter
from Mrs. Brown concerning the Nestorian
tablets and am herewith enclosing it.

Very truly yours,

Curator

HW ks
ENCL.

ROSWELL S. BRITTON
430 WEST 118TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y.

3 April 1937

Dear Mr. Wood

If you are coming to the Oriental
Club next Tuesday, and if it is not too much
trouble, would you be so good as to fetch along
that HOOFF printing block, and let me have it
long enough to get it inspected by a naturalist.
Many thanks.

Yours truly

Roswell S. Britton

*Delivered
at the meeting
Apr 6.*

New address

ROSWELL S. BRITTON
99 CLAREMONT AVENUE
NEW YORK

26 August 1937

Dear Mr. Wood

What with hot weather, buying a house in the country, moving into a smaller apartment, and now my family refugeeing thither from Shanghai, I have not had time to come up and work on the oracle bones. Thank you for keeping them. I hope to come up some time next week, or soon.

Very truly yours

Roswell S. Britton

August 27, 1937

Mr. Roswell S. Britton,
99 Claremont Ave.,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Britton:

I was wondering the other day if your family was in Shanghai. I trust nothing will happen to them. My wife's niece was over there, a Mrs. Charles Ferguson. Charlie had gone back to Shanghai a few months ago.

The oracle bones are as safe here as anywhere.

A new Chinese coin has recently come in and I am enclosing a photograph of it. It is supposed to be from Eastern Mongolia which I understand is an autonomous republic set up under the wing of China. Can you make out the four characters at the top? The lower characters show that at least it is a coin of the Chinese Republic. Also, do you know what pagoda is represented on this piece?

I will be away off and on during September but plan to be at the Society most Wednesdays.

Very truly yours,

Curator

HW ks